Wakatipu Basin Residential Subdivision and Development: Landscape Character Assessment

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June 2014
Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Queenstown Lakes District Council’s (QLDC) policy team as a part of its District Plan Review process. It has been identified that the review of the existing rural zones and the landscape provisions within the District Plan is to be a significant part of this larger review process. Particularly, it is considered that the cumulative effects of development in the Wakatipu Basin have not been well managed. This report aims to examine the landscape of the Basin, determine areas in which further development could occur, areas in which further development would threaten the landscape character and quality of the Basin as a whole, and examine the means by which its future management could be more effectively undertaken.

Background

The landscape management provisions of the Queenstown Lakes District Plan (the District Plan) were included in the District Plan as a direct consequence of an appeal to the Environment Court undertaken by a number of residents and organisations. The decision in the case (C180/99) established the landscape classification regime, objectives and policies and assessment matters by which the landscapes of the District has been managed since. This case, and the provisions based upon it, was based upon the analysis of the landscape of the Wakatipu Basin.

As the landscape management provisions of the District Plan have been implemented over the intervening years (since 2000) issues have arisen, particularly in regard to the management of development within the landscapes classified as Visual Amenity Landscapes. The 2009 District Plan Monitoring Report identified that the cumulative effects of development pressure within the Wakatipu Basin were not being effectively managed. It identified a disjuncture between the objectives and policies of the landscape categories identified within the Plan and the assessment matters and considered that these could more explicitly outline the desired landscape outcome, particularly for the Visual Amenity Landscapes.

The provisions of the District Plan with regard to landscape have two key characteristics. The first is that, like most planning documents in New Zealand, it is based on a picturesque aesthetic\(^1\). In essence this aesthetic is based on the assumption that a landscape should appear as a painting and be susceptible to the same analysis and critique. A consequence of the dominance of this picturesque aesthetic is that landscape is considered to be primarily a visual resource, or put another way, landscape is valued almost exclusively as scenery. This approach ignores the importance of landscape as place, and the central contribution that the character of the landscape makes to this

aspect. The Queenstown Lakes District Plan (the District Plan) landscape management provisions focus almost exclusively on managing the visibility of proposed development.

The landscape management provisions of the District Plan were based on the then best practice of the Landscape Architecture profession. The early training in this country focused strongly on ecology and on classical (picturesque) aesthetics and landscape assessment practice focused intensely on the visual, with some consideration given to ecology and to the promotion of healthy environmental systems. This approach derived from that developed by the American Forest Service whose primary goal was to avoid adverse effects on scenery of the clear felling of forests. In recent years the focus of the profession has changed slightly, largely stimulated by developments in Europe.

The prime driver of these developments has been the drafting and ratification of the European Landscape Convention (ELC)\(^2\). This Convention was ratified by Britain in 2006 and came into effect there in 2007. Its content is having an increasing influence on the practice of landscape assessment and landscape management in this country. The Convention defines ‘landscape’ as:

‘an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors;’

and this definition has been widely accepted by practitioners in this country. It also, usefully, defines landscape management as”

‘action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes;’

and landscape planning as:

‘strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.’

Member states of the European Union are required to implement the Convention and in Britain this has been achieved by the process of undertaking a national landscape character assessment. Every area of Britain, including urban areas, has been included in this process and these character assessments form the basis on which local government is expected to base their landscape planning and landscape management processes.

As a consequence of these changes the practice of landscape assessment itself has also undergone scrutiny and reconsideration in Britain. This has recently culminated in the third edition of the ‘Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment’ being published and adopted by the British Landscape Institute\(^3\). This document explains its relationship with the European Landscape Convention stating:

\(^2\) http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/Landscape/default_en.asp

The importance of the ELC definition is that it moves beyond the idea that landscape is only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity. Instead it encourages a focus on landscape as a resource in its own right. While not formally adopted by the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, it has been promoted by that organisation. It provides, what some of us feel, to be an answer to disquiet both within the profession and within the broader planning realm as to the robustness of landscape assessment practice. It does so by clearly separating the issues of landscape as a resource in its own right and as a visual resource. It is my intention to apply its framework and principles to this study so as to present a clear, consistent and robust approach to the management of the landscape of the Wakatipu Basin into the future.

The GLIVA approach to landscape assessment examines the potential effects of proposed development in terms of two principles. The first is that landscape is a resource in its own right. That resource can be identified and described though the process of landscape character assessment. Landscape character is defined as:

A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another.

Clearly this definition can be applied at many different scales, which is commensurate with the approach that landscapes can be nested, a theme which has been expressed in a number of Environment Court decisions regarding the Wakatipu. In terms of this definition, the landscape effects of potential development are those things which would disrupt (or enhance) that distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern.

Visual effects are defined as ‘the effects of change and development on the views available to people and their visual amenity’. These can be weighted according to the degree of sensitivity to change which people will experience with residents, recreational users of the landscape, and visitors desirous of experiencing scenery being the most sensitive groups. It is entirely possible, therefore, that a proposal could have significant adverse effects on landscape character but not significant visual effects. It is less likely, but also possible, that a proposal could have significant effects on visual amenity but not on the landscape resource.

\[4\] ibid P98
Wakatipu Basin: Current Condition

The first goal of this project is to assess the condition of the landscape of the Wakatipu Basin to determine of its ability to absorb further landscape change. In order to fulfil this goal it is necessary to establish some principles on which to base the assessment.

Methods

Firstly, it is considered that the Wakatipu Basin is a landscape character area in its own right. It is contained by significant mountains on all sides, and by significant rivers on three. Its original glacial origins are readily legible, and include moraine features and roche moutonnee. Its overall geomorphological pattern is one of a network of reasonably confined valleys interspersed with hummocky ridges and punctured by roche moutonnee. The majority of it retains a rural character typified by pastoral uses with open pasture of varying quality over most of the land area. Hawthorn hedges, Lombardy poplars, conifer shelterbelts and willows along waterways form the characteristic tree palette, with scattered remnant indigenous scrub present, mainly on steep and elevated landforms. This character is becoming less coherent as residential development spreads and intensifies in pockets.

In summary the following are considered to be the key characteristics of the Wakatipu Basin rural landscape:

- predominance of natural features over human made features
- high ratio of open space relative to the built environment and to the presence of trees
- significant areas in pasture, crops
- scattered indigenous vegetation
- presence of large numbers of farmed animals (sheep, cattle, deer, goats)
- low population densities relative to urban centres
- narrow, unsealed roads
- absence of urban infrastructure
- narrow range of tree species utilised for shelter
- amenity tree species restricted to the immediate vicinity of dwellings.

Conversely the major threats to rural character are:

- predominance of human made features, particularly buildings and structures
- high density of built form
- loss of pastoral/cropping activities;
- loss of indigenous vegetation
- lack of farmed species and preponderance of ‘lifestyle’ animals (horses, donkeys, llamas, alpaca)
• increased road formalisation by sealing, construction of kerb and channel, culverts etc
• presence of urban infrastructure (kerb and channel, sealed footpaths, street lighting)
• spread of amenity tree species across the landscape

The presence, or otherwise, and the quality of these characteristics was assessed for landscape units across the Basin. Landscape units, in this context are areas with similar character and generally, some degree of visual containment.

In order to undertake the assessment a desk top study was undertaken first in order to gain some familiarity with the following:
• geological foundations of the Wakatipu Basin
• hazard areas
• existing zoning
• consented development
• District Plan provisions.

Site visits to the Wakatipu Basin were then undertaken and a standardised landscape character assessment template was used as a basis for field notes.

It was found, in practice, that this template, taken from ‘Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland’ was of limited value, but it did enable the determination of landscape character sub-areas, referred to in this report as landscape units, throughout the basin in a systematic manner. An evaluation of the rural character of these areas was then undertaken and these given a numeric score which enabled the ranking of these areas. The absorptive capacity of the landscape in each landscape unit was then assessed in terms of the vulnerability of the landscape character to further change, and the vulnerability of the visual amenity provided by and within that landscape character area to degradation by further development. In the latter case that means that landscape units adjacent to major roads are immediately more vulnerable as they have more viewers. A key assumption is that the maintenance of rural character and landscape quality is important for the tourism industry.

Results:

General:

The overall finding is that the level of rural character remaining within the Wakatipu Basin is variable ranging from high in a few areas to more or less extinguished in others. The level of subdivision and development which has already been consented is such that a rural lifestyle character has already

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6 This is not to say that these areas do not, arguably, provide high amenity for their occupants and visitors.
spread over much of the Basin. In many areas the density of dwellings approximates one every 4ha or so. The southern end of Morven Ferry Road, Jeffry Road, Eastburn Road and Glencoe Road on the Crown Terrace seem to be the only remaining unsealed roads in the Basin. Amenity trees have been planted in swatches in previously open pasture as well as in association with residential development in the Hawthorn Triangle, Dalefield and other parts of the Basin. These trees in all of these locations diminish the rural character of the landscape; diminish the openness of the landscape; and have a domesticating effect which will increase dramatically as they mature. This will alter the landscape character of much of the Basin.

Key to providing a remaining sense of rurality and of local character in the Basin are the outstanding natural landscapes which surround and enclose the it, and the outstanding natural features which puncture its floor. While some of these, notably Mount Dewar, the face of Coronet Peak, and the Crown Terrace escarpment are all heavily infested with wilding exotic trees, they nonetheless retain the predominance of natural features, high ratio of open space (without buildings), significant areas of vegetation, and low population densities which enable them to be seen as the rural context of the Basin. It is the case that the District Plan seems to have been effective in managing the spread of residential development in these areas. It appears that this is a result of the performance standard which requires development in these landscapes to be ‘reasonably difficult to see’. In addition to these outstanding natural landscapes other, more rural, areas of the Basin floor also contribute the rural context to areas which have little remaining rural character within them.

**Recommendation:** Continue to ensure the protection of the Outstanding Natural Landscapes and Features of the Wakatipu Basin from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

A summary of the results of the analysis on an area by area basis is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. It is to be noted that the analysis was not restricted to the Rural General zone, treating the landscape of the Basin Floor as a continuous unit. On the basis of this analysis I consider that there are a number of areas of the Basin in which future development could be focused without detracting from the landscape character and visual amenity of the Basin as a whole, and a number of areas which are extremely vulnerable.

**Areas for further residential development:**

In my opinion future residential development within the Basin should be concentrated in the areas where it would have the least impact on the existing landscape character and visual amenity of the overall Basin landscape. Within the Basin these areas have mainly been identified because the level of existing development has diminished the rurality of the landscape character area already, and

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7 Each area is identified by a number on the map attached as Appendix 2.
because the existing contribution to the overall visual amenity is already relatively low (while the local visual amenity may remain high). Areas currently zoned Rural General in which these criteria combine are the Hawthorn Triangle (area 9), Fitzpatrick Basin (area 6); Mooney Road (area 3); and Alec Robbins Road (area 20). It is my opinion that future development within the Wakatipu Basin should be encouraged to occur within these areas.

In the case of the Hawthorn Triangle that, while zoned Rural General, the level of subdivision which had been consented in that area already exceeds the allowable density of the Rural Lifestyle zone in some areas. In order to concentrate further development in this area a minimum lot size of 1ha in the area bounded by Lower Shotover, Domain and Speargrass Flat Roads should be considered. The surrounding margins of this area could be rezoned Rural Lifestyle, which would provide a transition between the density on the flat and that of the land retained as Rural General above. To a considerable extent this would simply acknowledge the level of development currently in place. This zoning should include: the area to the west of Domain Road to the edge of the river terrace escarpment (the boundary of the Outstanding Natural Feature of the Shotover River); and the area east of Lower Shotover Road, extending approximately to the 400m contour to the north of Slope Hill Road rising to the 420m contour in the vicinity of Springbank south of Slope Hill Road. This suggested zoning is illustrated on the map attached as Appendix 3.

**Recommendation:** Allow subdivision to 1ha in the area bounded by Lower Shotover, Domain and Speargrass Flat Roads as a permitted activity providing a suite of design controls were met covering the exterior appearance of the dwelling and the landscaping proposed.

**Recommendation:** Rezone the land on the margins of the Hawthorn Triangle Rural Lifestyle.

The Fitzpatrick Basin (area 6) incorporates an area of Rural Lifestyle zoning currently but is, in the main, Rural General. The boundary of the rural lifestyle area is entirely incoherent from a landscape perspective, protruding into an area of the basin floor. The basin is contained, with views into it obscured by the surrounding ridgelines. It is my opinion that the Rural Lifestyle zoning should be extended to incorporate the majority of this Basin, extending towards the top of the ridgeline which runs approximately along the southern side of Fitzpatrick Road and to the vicinity of the 440m contour along the north of the Basin. This zoning is illustrated on the map attached as Appendix 3. I consider that the portion of land between the Shotover River and this southern ridgeline should remain zoned Rural General (area 6a). This area has had its rural character compromised to a degree by the consenting of residential development within it, and has had its visual amenity compromised to a greater degree by this development also. I consider that it is close to the limit of its ability to absorb development.
**Recommendation:** Rezone the Fitzpatrick Basin Rural Lifestyle.

The Mooney Road Basin (area 3) is an area which is entirely contained and as a consequence the effects of development also can be contained within the valley. Development has tended to occur in elevated locations on both sides of the valley, possibly in part owing to the wet nature of much of the valley floor. It is considered, however, that this area has the capacity to absorb further residential development without adverse effects on the landscape of the Basin as a whole. The rezoning of this area as Rural Lifestyle would assist in focussing future development into this area. A requirement should be, however, that development within this landscape unity not be visible from either Malaghans Road or Speargrass Flat Road.

**Recommendation:** Rezone the Mooney Road basin Rural Lifestyle with the requirement that no new residential development should be visible from Malaghans Road or Speargrass Flat Road.

The area in Alec Robbins Road (area 20) to which this report refers is that which is bound by the escarpment of Morven Hill on one side, Hayes Creek to the west and State Highway 6 to the north. The more northern lots in this area are of Rural Residential size, even though they are zoned Rural General. The lots to the west of Alec Robbins Road are larger, but the development has been contained by the topography to the level terrace area, concentrating its domesticating effect. The open pasture to the west of Alec Robbins Road is not particularly visible from State Highway 6 and consequently does not make a significant contribution to the visual amenity of travellers on that road. It does provide a rural mid-ground to residents of Lake Hayes Estate in their views of Morven Hill. The rezoning of this area Rural Lifestyle would provide for further development possibilities without significant adverse effects on the character or visual amenity of the wider Basin and should be considered. This zoning is illustrated on the map attached as Appendix 3.

**Recommendation:** Rezone the land adjacent to Alec Robbins Road Rural Lifestyle.

**Areas in which further residential development should be avoided:**

There are a number of landscape units within the Basin in which the character and visual amenity of the area are both considered to be vulnerable to further change. Several of these areas are immediately adjacent to areas of intensive development and are thus seen as vulnerable to development pressure. Others are significant areas which contribute the majority of the remaining rural character to the Basin as a whole.

The Crown Terrace (area 17) as a whole is considered to be highly vulnerable to both character change and to the degradation of its visual amenity. It is a reasonably expansive and open area
which has, thus far, retained its rural character typified by large paddocks, shelter belts and agricultural activities. It is deeply cut by the Royal Burn, Swift Burn and other unnamed creeks and this feature, combined with the hummocky glacial deposits of the terrace edge, provides some topographical complexity which may provide some further absorptive capacity. Given, however, that there are some thirty consented but as yet undeveloped building platforms on the terrace, it is considered that further development is likely to have significant adverse effects on the landscape character, the visual amenity of the vicinity, or both. In addition, the presence of residential development along the rim of the terrace escarpment threatens to compromise the visual amenity of persons on the Basin floor, for whom the views of the Crown Range are important.

**Recommendation:** Avoid further subdivision and residential development on the Crown Terrace, either through specific provisions in the District Plan and/or by increasing the rigour of the relevant assessment matters including requiring that any further residential development should not be visible from locations on the Basin floor, and that the open, pastoral landscape character of the terrace must be preserved.

Malaghans Valley (area 2) is also considered to be a landscape unit which is highly vulnerable to changes in both its landscape character and to the visual amenity which it provides. It remains the most extensive area of pastoral land in agricultural production in the Basin (other than the Crown Terrace). In addition to these aspects of its character, its readily legible glacial deposits along the valley floor give it a high level of interest, and visual amenity. Sporadic residential development is located, predominantly, along the southern side of the valley, on the valley floor and, to a greater extent, on the north facing slopes of Malaghans Ridge. This creates pockets of domestication which detract from the rural character of the valley to a degree. In terms of visual amenity, however, their impact is lessened by the tendency to focus on Coronet Peak and its associated mountains. It is considered that the protection of the rural character of this landscape unit is of very high importance to the maintenance of the remaining rural character and visual amenity of the Basin.

**Recommendation:** Avoid further subdivision and residential development of the Malaghans Road landscape unit, either through specific provisions in the District Plan or by increasing the rigour of the relevant assessment matters including requiring that any further residential development should not be visible from locations in Malaghans Road, and that the open, pastoral landscape character of the valley must be preserved.

The Speargrass Flat Valley (area 12) is another area of the Basin in which the landscape character remains essentially rural. It has been compromised to degree by the planting of amenity trees along a portion of the road boundary and in swaths across the upper slopes on the northern wall of the valley. It remains relatively free of domesticating residential development, however, until the Rural
Residential Zone of North Lake Hayes is reached. Consented but as yet undeveloped sites on the northern ridge should not give rise to dwellings which are prominent from the valley floor. It is considered that the protection of the rural character of this landscape unit is of high importance to the maintenance of the remaining rural character and visual amenity of the Basin.

**Recommendation:** Avoid further subdivision and residential development of the Speargrass Flat Valley landscape unit, either through specific provisions in the District Plan or by increasing the rigour of the relevant assessment matters including requiring that any further residential development should not be visible from locations in Speargrass Flat Road, and that the open, pastoral landscape character of the valley must be preserved.

The Littles Stream Valley (area 7) is located to the west of the Fitzpatrick Basin. The upper reaches of the valley are visible from the vicinity of Hansens Road and Lake Johnston and the western from Arthurs Point. The lower reaches are more visually discrete. The area does contribute to the visual amenity experienced from those locations, however, and from properties within the valley itself. In terms of landscape character, the lower reaches have now been subdivided into lots in the vicinity of 4ha each. The higher slopes are in larger lots, and the removal of a block of Douglas fir is assisting in restoring the pastoral character of this area. It is considered, however, that both in terms of character and visual amenity this landscape character area is at the brink of its ability to absorb development. It is considered that the protection of the rural character of this landscape character area is of high importance to the maintenance of the remaining rural character and visual amenity of the Basin.

**Recommendation:** Avoid further subdivision and residential development of the Littles Stream Valley, either through specific provisions in the District Plan or by increasing the rigour of the relevant assessment matters including requiring that any further residential development should not be visible from locations in Littles Road, Arthurs Point and Hansens Road.

The Arthurs Point Basin (area 8) is located to the west and north of the Littles Stream Valley. It is an ice evacuated basin of some geological significance and is contained within the Outstanding Natural Landscape (Wakatipu Basin). It is enclosed by steep cliffs to its east, steep escarpments to the north and west, and the Shotover River to the south. The floor of the basin is undulating in the north smoothing to river terraces in the south. The natural character of the basin has been compromised by its pastoral use and residential development. It rural character also has been compromised by the presence of residential development in the south western quarter of the basin, and by the spread of wilding trees particularly along its western margins. Its visual amenity, however, is very high and its vulnerability is considered to be very high also. It is considered that the protection of the rural

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character of this landscape character area is of high importance to the maintenance of the remaining rural character and visual amenity of the Basin, and that the enhancement of its natural character should be a priority.

**Recommendation:** Avoid further subdivision and residential development of the Arthurs Point basin by specific provision in the District Plan. Encourage the enhancement of the natural character of the Basin.

The margins of the Arrow River from the Arrow Junction Bridge south to the confluence with the Kawarau River and east to the foot of the Crown Terrace (area 18) form another landscape unit. This area has been subdivided into a range of lot sizes but most are larger, 10 to 20ha and so residential development remains reasonably dispersed and discrete. Rural character remains reasonably high but is at risk of further fragmentation and domestication and is considered to be vulnerable to change. This area is the first part of the Wakatipu Basin which is experienced by someone travelling from Cromwell on State Highway 6. It currently has high visual amenity and it is considered that this amenity is vulnerable to change also. It is considered that the protection of the rural character of this landscape character area is of high importance to the maintenance of the remaining rural character and visual amenity of the Basin.

**Recommendation:** Avoid further subdivision and residential development of the Arrow River margins area by specific provision in the District Plan.

The area to the north and east of the North Lake Hayes Rural Residential zone is considered to be another landscape character area (area 13) which has moderate remaining rural character and moderate to high visual amenity. Both have been compromised by prominent residential development along the eastern slopes below the Hills Golf Course, and by the Rural Residential and Rural Lifestyle zoning which protrudes north into this area. This area provides a rural break between the development which surrounds Lake Hayes and Millbrook which is located over the ridgeline to the north. While the area is a continuation of the Speargrass Valley to its west, it is considered separately because it has both positive features, particularly the avenue of trees associated with the Ayrburn homestead, and detractions, as discussed, which do not influence the valley. As such it is considered that the protection of the remaining rural character and visual amenity is highly desirable.

**Recommendation:** Manage further subdivision and development by increasing the rigour of the relevant assessment matters.

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9 A resource consent granted on Part Section 29 Block XIX Shotover Survey District which encompasses the eastern cliffs includes the clearance of weeds and their revegetation which will enhance the natural character of the vicinity.
Recommendation: Consider the rezoning of the area as Rural Lifestyle within 10 to 15 years depending on development pressure.

The area to the immediate north of the Hawthorn Triangle is another area where a moderately high level of rural character has been retained, and which provides moderately high visual amenity to surrounding areas (area 11). It is also the case here, however, that the loss of this rural character and visual amenity would have fairly limited consequences on the rural character of the Basin as a whole, provided the slopes to the north east remained rural in character.

Recommendation: Manage further subdivision and development by increasing the rigour of the relevant assessment matters.

Recommendation: Consider the rezoning of the area as Rural Lifestyle within 10 to 15 years depending on development pressure.

Ladies Mile, between Lake Hayes and the Shotover River (area 19), provides an important introduction to the Wakatipu for visitors travelling from Cromwell and Wanaka. While the rural character of the area has been compromised by the fragmenting and domesticating effects of residential development on the northern side of the road, the extent of these effects on the southern side has been considerably less. Consequently expansive views to Cecil and Walter Peaks are possible over open pasture providing high visual amenity. It is considered that the protection of the remaining rural character and visual amenity of this landscape unit is of high importance to the maintenance of the remaining rural character and visual amenity of the Basin and that further development in this area should be avoided.

Recommendation: Avoid further subdivision and residential development of the Ladies Mile landscape unit by specific provision in the District Plan.

The balance of the Wakatipu Basin could be said to be in an intermediate zone, where landscape character and visual amenity are moderately vulnerable. This includes most of the elevated areas of Malaghans Ridge (area 4); the Slope Hill Valley (area 14 on Appendix 2) and North Slope Hill (area 10 on Appendix 2); Arrow Junction (area 24); the McDonnell Road Valley (area 16) and the eastern end of Malaghans Valley (area 21). In all of these areas the relatively complex topography is central to their localised landscape character and its vulnerability to change is limited. The lack of visibility from public and private locations limits the potential effects of further development on the visual amenity of the Basin as a whole. This is not to say that subdivision and development proposals in these areas do not require active management to ensure that this is the outcome.
**Recommendation:** Manage further subdivision and development by increasing the rigour of the relevant assessment matters.

**Potential Management Methods**

**Minimum lot sizes**

One option for introducing a greater level of control over development in the Basin which has been mooted is the determination of a minimum lot size to be imposed in addition to the landscape based assessment criteria. This option raises the objection that allowable size of allotments is always arbitrary. I do not consider this to be entirely accurate. It is my observation that allotments of less than 5ha in area are small enough that land management practices which are essentially domestic in nature (mowing, tree planting, gardening) are feasible. Between 5 and 10 hectares some rural land management practices usually become necessary (animals, baleage, cropping) but fragmentation by division into small pastures, the planting of shelter belts and woodlots, and domestication by the planting of large numbers of amenity trees frequently occurs. At 10 to 15 hectares, while all of these practices may be undertaken, the size of the property limits the scale of the undertaking and the extent of the fragmentation and domestication is limited. At around 15ha, it seems from observation, rural character can be maintained.

If it is then accepted that a minimum lot size for the maintenance of rural character is 15ha, it is necessary to examine what effect the imposition of this would be within the areas of the Basin in which further development might occur. It seems that in order to be effective a minimum lot size would need to enable sufficient further subdivision to direct development into areas where the landscape can absorb it while deterring development in areas where it cannot. It would clearly be effective in preventing further subdivision in many areas where the landscape has already been subjected to fairly intensive subdivision. While not an exhaustive analysis, these include: the margins of the Arrow River south of the Arrow Junction Bridge; Ladies Mile; Littles Stream Basin; Fitzpatrick Basin; North Lake Hayes; and the McDonnell Road Valley. It would not, however, be effective in facilitating subdivision in the areas in which the landscape might absorb further development such as Malaghans Ridge and Morven Ferry. While a number of holdings along Malaghans Ridge are of sufficient size to be subdivided into 15ha blocks, the proportion of these sites which could be so subdivided without adverse landscape or visual effects would be much smaller.

For example, Ayrburn Estates own 131ha of land at the eastern end of the Speargrass Flat Valley/ Malaghans Ridge landscape character areas\(^\text{10}\). Of this only approximately 36ha of land is located on the top of the ridge where development may possibly be absorbed, the south facing slopes and valley

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\(^{10}\) Its legal description is Part Lot 3 DP 5737, Lot 4 DP 319854 and Lots 3- 5 DP 343305
floor being considered to be highly sensitive to both character change and changes in visual amenity. In fact, subdivision consent for three lots has already been granted on this property, and three building platforms are already located within this area. There is another aspect of this property which is relevant to this investigation. That is, it is on this property that large swathes of exotic amenity trees have been planted on the south facing slopes, noted above, and it is anticipated that this will have an increasingly domesticating effect on the landscape of the Speargrass Valley as the trees grow demonstrating that even on large properties inappropriate management can be undertaken which will have adverse landscape effects.

While it is considered that 15ha is the minimum lot size necessary to ensure that rural character and rural amenity is preserved it is also worth examining the impact of a smaller minimum, one at which significant domestication may still be avoided, of 10ha. At this minimum lot size none of the vulnerable areas of the Basin would be protected from further subdivision. It would enable subdivision within the areas identified for further development but with the attendant risk of adverse effects on landscape and visual amenity which would still require management.

A further consideration needs to be made. It is the case that in some subdivisions within the District the landscape and visual effects have been successfully managed by the use of common or balance lots, or management covenants. ‘Stonebridge’ for example, has a total of eight residential lots on a total site of 20ha, giving a land area per dwelling of 2.5ha per dwelling. The residential use of the site is restricted to an area of 4.1ha, however, providing each dwelling a curtilage of approximately 2000m2. The surrounding balance of approximately 16ha is maintained as productive agricultural land owned in common by the lot owners. This has been successful in reducing the domesticating effect of the overall development. Ayrburn Estate is an example of a management covenant, where the lots are run as a productive farm, the lot owners being restricted in their influence to a relatively small curtilage area. This does maintain the floor of the eastern part of the Speargrass Valley as productive, pastoral land, but its effectiveness has been compromised by the planting of the exotic amenity trees discussed above. It would appear that a minimum lot size would remove, or seriously hamper, the ability to undertake these more creative methods of achieving effective landscape management within the Basin.

**Recommendation:** The inclusion of a minimum lot size would not assist in the maintenance of rural character in the Wakatipu Basin.

**Plan provisions**

I have undertaken an analysis of the landscape provisions in the Plan in Sections 4 and 5. This clearly demonstrates a number of problems with both the policies and objectives and the assessment
matters. I attach the analysis as Appendix 4. In summary there are a number of general points to be made. Firstly, the definitions of the landscape classifications and the issues which concern each type are confused. The reference to ‘openness’ in reference to Outstanding Natural Landscapes is misplaced given that, apart from the high tussock grasslands, the natural condition of most of the ONLs of the District was forested. Given that the classification is based on S6(b) of the RMA, it would reasonably be expected that maintaining and enhancing the natural character and outstanding quality of those landscapes should be a major focus. Similarly, as S7(c) is the basis justifying the Visual Amenity Landscape category, references to ‘enhancing natural character’ again seem misplaced, and the maintenance and enhancement of amenity (not just visual amenity) would appear to be a more logical focus.

**Recommendation:** The definitions of the landscape categories should be rewritten so as to better reflect the intentions of the enabling legislation.

The definition of the Visual Amenity Landscapes is particularly problematic. The reference to Arcadian landscapes has, in my opinion, led to much confusion, both amongst lay people and professionals, neither group having a clear grasp of what it actually means. In addition the definition refers to ‘pastoral or arcadian’. It is unclear if this means that the Plan aims to have regard to both landscape characters, or if they are different ways of stating the same thing.

Arcadia was, in fact, a common subject of the early picturesque painters and as such has made a significant contribution to the development of the picturesque aesthetic. An examination of these paintings has led me to the conclusion that an ‘Arcadian’ landscape has a number of distinct features. These are:

- the landscape of the fore and mid-ground is fine-grained and broken into small, reasonably discrete areas by vegetation and topography;
- there are areas of rugged topography (cliffs, waterfalls);
- the fore and mid-ground landscape contains many large trees;
- the mountainous context of the site is distant and its detail indistinct;
- buildings are always visible and these are often temples;
- there are animals present, usually sheep or goats;
- there is water, either a river, lake, pond or the sea;
- there are always people present, usually resting if they are a worker (shepherd or goatherd) or recreating as is the case in both of these paintings.

This arcadian landscape is, first and foremost, an idealised rural landscape which bears little relationship to a productive or truly pastoral rural landscape. It is the landscape recreated in the picturesque parks of England. Its inclusion as a part of the definition of Visual Amenity Landscapes
has led to landscape professionals considering that its development within the District is a goal of the Plan. This, in combination with the direction to enhance natural character, has been used as justification for the planting of many exotic amenity trees; of avoiding linear planting, even when it is entirely in keeping with the character of the vicinity; and of considering residential development partially screened from sight to be acceptable. It has strongly influenced the developing character of the Wakatipu Basin.

In my opinion the areas of the Basin which most clearly demonstrate arcadian qualities are Dalefield; the Hawthorn Triangle; the slopes of Slope Hill to the south of Slope Hill Road; and Arrow Junction. These are the most modified and highly developed areas of the Basin. There are also those who consider that the development of this character is positive, and I have heard it argued that the Hawthorn Triangle will, in time, have the character of Thurby Domain. The Domain is on a south facing slope and was planted at a time when sun and views were not high priorities. Far from developing a similar character I consider it more likely that the presence of large amenity trees within the Hawthorn Triangle is likely to provoke neighbourhood conflict over lost views and shading. Further, the spread of this English parkland character across the landscape obscures the landforms and topography and diminishes the local, indigenous character of the Basin.

It is my opinion that if there is a desire to slow the subdivision and residential development of the Wakatipu Basin and to protect the local character of the landscape then it is necessary to amend the definition of Visual Amenity Landscapes to remove references to ‘arcadia’.

**Recommendation:** Remove all references to arcadian landscape character from the District Plan.

While the plan does discuss the issues associated with each landscape classification these are very generalised and rather confused and confusing, as noted above. I consider that it would be advantageous to establish specific descriptions, identified threats and positive goals for the management of character areas within the broader District landscapes. Such a description of the character and threats to it are listed above. Positive goals for the management of the Basin could include such things as the removal/control of wilding species including hawthorn, sycamore and conifer species. I do consider that public consultation in the setting of goals for the management of landscapes is critical.

**Recommendation:** Develop, in consultation with the public, specific objectives for the management and enhancement of the landscape of the Wakatipu Basin.

The assessment matters repeatedly confuse matters of landscape character with visual amenity. This, plus the overwhelming focus on the visual (we are talking about Visual Amenity Landscapes)
has resulted in the consenting of many developments within the Wakatipu Basin which compromise the character of the landscape. They do so by the planting of amenity trees, particularly avenues along driveways; by the fragmentation and enclosure of the pastoral landscape; and by the spreading of structures across the landscape. Separating out these two aspects, character and visual amenity, in keeping with current best practice, would improve Council’s ability to manage the effects of development on both landscape character and on visual amenity, and improve the ability of landscape professionals to accurately assess the effects of development. It may be necessary to amend the name ‘Visual Amenity Landscapes’ to reflect this change of focus, possibly to Amenity Landscapes.

The separation of landscape character and visual amenity could simplify the assessment matters considerably. Each landscape category would have a set of assessment matters tailored to the assessment of effects on the landscape character and quality it is considered important to maintain and/or enhance. In all landscapes the goal should be to ensure that development does not adversely affect the character of the surrounding landscape within its vicinity, and could include requirements for the enhancement of that character. The definition of vicinity could vary depending on the landscape, with that of ONLs being larger than that of VALs. Alternatively, and particularly with regard to the Wakatipu Basin, landscape units could be defined in the Plan and the requirement made that development within each unit not have an adverse effect on the character of that unit. As visual amenity is important within all landscapes classifications, it could be possible to have one set of assessment matters for all landscape categories.

**Recommendation:** Rewrite the landscape assessment matters so as to separate issues of landscape character and visual amenity.

In addition, the inclusion of performance standards in the assessment matters would provide objective (or relatively objective) baselines by which further development could be assessed. Such standards could include requirements that further residential development must not be visible from Malaghans Road or Speargrass Flat Road, for example.

**Recommendation:** Use specific performance standards to manage future development within the Wakatipu Basin and elsewhere.

Specific sections of the assessment matters require particular attention. The first is that relating to the Form and Density of Development (S5.4.2.2(3)(c)). While these assessment matters also confuse visual and character aspects of the landscape their most significant failing relates to the so-called ‘circle criteria’. It is my understanding that the first criterion, that development be located within 50m of...
of existing development, was based on an analysis of the tradition rural farm cluster where the
dwelling, barn, shearing shed and shearers quarters were found to be located within approximately
50m of one another. Consequently the aim of this part of the section is to encourage development to
mimic the traditional pattern which is a part of the landscape character and where that is not the case
then Council wishes to be reassured that the chosen location is the best possible (within a 500m
radius). The 1.1km radius, also the definition of ‘vicinity’ elsewhere in Section 5, arose from an
analysis of the spacing of the original homesteads in the Basin, another example of trying to mesh
future development into the existing character of the landscape. Thus, while this section has aimed
to ensure that development within the VAL does not have an adverse effect on the settlement pattern
and thus landscape character I consider that it has failed. In the main that failure is due to the
obscure meaning and intention of the section which simply remains beyond most people’s ken.

**Recommendation:** Delete this assessment matter.

The second group of assessment matters which require specific examination are those relating to
cumulative effects (S5.4.2.2(3)(d)). A superficial reading of these assessment matters suggests that
they are reasonably clear in their intent. That they have failed in containing development in the
Wakatipu Basin is also clear. In my opinion this is largely due to two things. One is the tendency to
take the ‘it’s stuffed anyway’ approach to cumulative effects on the landscape. This would not be
acceptable in regard to issues such as water quality and should be no more acceptable in regard to
landscape.

The other is the underlying failure to be clear about specifically what the landscape resource is which
is necessary to determine how much is left and therefore, whether or not the cumulative effect of a
proposal is a step too far. This can be addressed by a clear understanding of the character of the
landscape and the features and patterns which contribute to this character. Cumulative effects on
caracter may include alterations to the fabric of the landscape either by the removal of key elements
or the inclusion of new ones; changes to the scale, diversity, pattern, colour or other aesthetic aspect
of the landscape; or, combined, alterations to the key characteristics possibly leading to a new
landscape character.

With regard to cumulative visual effects, this relates to the effects on particular people or groups of
people and involves the characteristics of views and the visual amenity enjoyed by people from
particular locations. These effects may occur in a stationary location where they are of combination,
where instead of one dwelling two may be seen in a single view, or in succession where one instead
of one dwelling being visible in a single view the viewer must turn to see the second. When moving
through a landscape cumulative effects are sequential and concern the frequency of affected views.
**Recommendation:** Rewrite the cumulative effects assessment matters to clarify separation between landscape and visual effects.

**Recommendation:** Clarify the nature of the landscape resource by defining landscape character areas and defining specific goals for their management.

In conclusion I consider that the rewriting of the landscape provisions of the plan to more clearly and appropriately define the landscape categories and to clarify the division between landscape character and visual amenity would improve the ability of Council to manage development in all areas of the District. I consider that it may be appropriate to introduce specific goals for particular landscape areas within the District in order to define the aspects of their character which it is sought to maintain, or the means by which they could be enhanced.

**Environmental compensation**

The idea has been mooted that applications for subdivision and residential development within the Wakatipu Basin could be expedited if they included environmental compensation in the form of revegetation or ecological enhancement. While this idea is certainly worthy of consideration there are a number of issues which the suggestion raises.

It is the case that the majority of the Basin floor, and certainly the areas where development has occurred and those which I have identified as having capacity for more development are, in the main, within areas where indigenous vegetation is considered to be acutely or chronically threatened. Chronically threatened areas tend to be on the steeper escarpments and acutely threatened areas on the flats and on the hummocky elevated land. The extent of the problem is such that it would seem that the contribution which could be made by any revegetation associated with further development not yet consented would be minute. While anything may be better than nothing, figuring a formula which would provide a reasonable exchange between revegetation and expedited development would be a challenge. This is not to say, however, that it would not be appropriate to encourage the protection and re-establishment of indigenous vegetation as a positive effect of development and this could be done through the rewriting of the assessment matters. It would also be necessary to make the protection and re-establishment of indigenous vegetation communities within areas where it is categorised as chronically or acutely threatened a clear goal for the management of the Basin.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

In conclusion, it is considered that much of the difficulty which has arisen in applying the landscape management strategies of the QLDC District Plan stem from the poor and confusing definitions of the
landscape categories, and from the confusion of landscape and visual amenity effects. It is considered that rewriting parts of the plan to remove these confusions would increase the ease and clarity with which the assessment matters could be applied. This alone would not, however, be adequate to ensure that the management of the Wakatipu Basin landscape would improve. This requires the formulation of clear objectives and goals for the management of that landscape, and clear descriptions of the character that it is desired to maintain and/or promote.

It is considered that the most effective way to direct development into areas within the Basin where the effects of that development can be contained is to rezone areas Rural Lifestyle. The effectiveness of the objectives, policies and rules for that zone have been beyond the scope of this report. It is the case that under the current regime the landscape classifications do not apply in the Rural Lifestyle Zone. While not recommending that change, I do consider that these zones should be subject to the overarching goals of the landscape management of the Basin as a whole. That way the character of the development within these zones can be managed to be in sympathy with the character of the wider basin, if at a much higher density.

Finally, I have come to the conclusion that the continuation of the discretionary regime is the best way to manage development in the balance of the Basin in conjunction with clarified assessment matters and the inclusion of performance standards. These performance standards should be rigorous enough to ensure that any further development cannot compromise the character or visual amenity of the remaining pastoral areas, nor the character of the wider basin.